व्यसन-साक्ष्य

VYASAN-SAKSHYA

THE SEVEN GATES

How Jainism Mapped the Psychology of Self-Destruction, Twenty-Five Centuries Before Modern Science

A Study of the Sapta Vyasan in the Light of Modern Psychology, Neuroscience, and Global Data

Working Draft — Introduction and Chapter One
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Introduction

A List That Would Not Die

Somewhere around the tenth century, in the court of the Rashtrakuta king Krishna III, a Digambara monk named Somadeva Suri sat down to write a work of fiction. The Yashastilaka Champu (959 CE) tells the story of a king named Yashodhara, and inside that story it pauses — as classical Indian texts love to do — to teach. The lesson it teaches is a list: sapta vyasan, the seven addictions, the seven habits that a householder should recognise as the ready-made doors to hell, narakasya dvarani. The same list, in slightly different words, appears a few centuries earlier in Acharya Samantabhadra's Ratnakaranda Shravakachara, the foundational manual for lay Jain conduct, and it recurs across nearly every subsequent shravakachara — the genre of texts written specifically to guide the Jain layperson, as distinct from the monk. That detail matters more than it first appears: this was never a monastic curiosity for renunciates who had already left the world. It was written for people who still gambled at festivals, still ate meat at someone else's table, still drank at a wedding, still lied to a customer over a scale. It was, in other words, ethics for people exactly like us.

The list itself is short enough to hold in one hand: **द्यूत** (dyuta, gambling), **मांस-भक्षण** (mamsa-bhakshana, eating meat), **मद्यपान** (madyapana, drinking alcohol), **वेश्यागमन** (veshya-gamana, consorting with prostitutes), **आखेट** or **शिकार** (akheta/shikar, hunting for sport), **चोरी** (chorya, theft), and **परस्त्री-गमन** (paradara/parastri-gamana, adultery). A closely related eighth discipline, **रात्रि-भोजन त्याग** (ratri-bhojana-tyaga, the renunciation of eating after dark), is not one of the seven in the classical enumeration — it belongs to a different category of vow, the mula-guna or root disciplines — but it is taught in the same breath, for the same reason, so often that popular memory has folded it into the family. This book keeps the two categories honest and separate, while treating all eight together, because the argument this book wants to make does not depend on getting the taxonomy blurred: it depends on noticing what these eight things have in common as pieces of applied psychology, whichever shelf the librarians put them on.

Doors to Hell, Read Differently

It would be easy — and it would be a way of not reading this material at all — to hear "doors to hell" and file the whole list under religious threat, a stick used to keep medieval householders in line. That reading says more about the reader's discomfort with the word "hell" than about the text. Read the commentaries and a different picture appears: narakasya dvaram is not a punishment threatened by an external judge. It is a structural claim about cause and effect inside a single life. Each of the seven is described, again and again, using the language of chitta-vibhrama — the corruption or clouding of the citta, the thinking-and-feeling mind — before it is described using the language of sin. The gambler is not condemned because gambling is arbitrarily forbidden; he is condemned

because the text has watched, across enough generations, what a mind trained on chance and craving eventually does to its own judgment, its own honesty, its own relationships. The seven vyasans are not a list of divine tripwires. They are a list of feedback loops — habits that reliably corrode the very faculty (viveka, discernment) a person needs in order to notice they are being corroded. That is a psychological claim, not merely a theological one, and it is testable.

This book takes it at its word and tests it — chapter by chapter, vice by vice — against the tools a tenth-century monk did not have: functional neuroimaging, randomised controlled trials, national health surveys, securities-regulator data, and global databases that did not exist until satellites and the internet made them possible. The finding, worked out across the chapters that follow, is not that the Acharyas were secretly scientists. It is something more interesting: that sustained, disciplined introspection — watching thousands of lay lives over centuries, refined generation after generation by monks whose entire vocation was the observation of mind and consequence — arrived, by a completely different road, at conclusions that double-blind trials and dopamine assays are only now confirming. Two methods, separated by two and a half thousand years and by every possible difference in vocabulary, technology, and worldview, keep landing on the same coordinates. That convergence is the subject of this book.

How This Book Works

Each chapter that follows is built in four movements, and the discipline of following the same four movements every time is deliberate — it is what keeps this a study and not a sermon.

- —First, the classical position: what the Jain texts actually say about this particular vyasan, in which text, in what words, and — as far as the sources allow — why the Acharyas ranked and reasoned about it the way they did.
- —Second, the modern mechanism: what contemporary neuroscience and psychology have found about the same behaviour — what it does to the brain's reward circuitry, its impulse control, its capacity for honest self-report.
- —Third, the modern ledger: what today's global data — WHO reports, peer-reviewed epidemiology, national regulatory studies — say about the scale and cost of that same behaviour in the world as it actually exists in 2026, not in the abstract.
- —Fourth, the synthesis: where the ancient diagnosis and the modern data agree, where they diverge, and what a reader today — who has no plan to become a monk and no interest in being lectured — might actually do with the convergence.

Nothing in this book asks the reader to adopt Jain monastic vows. It asks a narrower and, I think, more useful question: if a filtering system built for renunciation turns out to have accurately flagged, twenty-five centuries in advance, the exact behaviours that neuroscience now shows hijack the brain's reward system and the exact behaviours that public-health data now shows carry the largest

hidden costs to individuals and societies — what does that tell us about the quality of the observation behind it? This is a book about evidence, not obligation.

The Shape of the Whole

The table below is the map for the complete project. Two sections of it — this Introduction and Chapter One, on gambling — are finished and form the rest of this draft. The remaining six vyasan chapters and the linked chapter on night-eating will be researched and added in the same sequence and to the same standard, growing this single manuscript rather than splitting into separate files, in keeping with how this author's earlier books in the same spirit — on Jain epigraphy and on Jain educational history — were built.

A Roadmap for the Whole Book

This book is being written and delivered the way the Acharyas themselves worked — one discipline examined fully before the next is taken up. What follows is the complete architecture: nine sections in all, of which the Introduction and Chapter One are complete in this draft. The remaining chapters will be researched and written the same way — classical source first, then the neuroscience, then the global data, then the synthesis — and added to this same growing manuscript.

Section	Sanskrit / Hindi Term	Its Modern Mirror
Introduction	**सप्त व्यसन — परिचय**	Why an eighth-century ethical checklist reads like a twenty-first-century behavioural-science syllabus.
Chapter 1	**जुआ** (द्यूत) — Gambling	Dopamine, variable-ratio reward, and the ₹1.8-lakh-crore lesson of India's own F&O traders.
Chapter 2	**मांस भक्षण** — Meat-eating	Zoonotic spillover, antibiotic resistance, and the EAT-Lancet planetary health data.
Chapter 3	**मद्यपान** — Alcohol	WHO's 2.6-million-deaths-a-year ledger and the neuroscience of disinhibition.
Chapter 4	**वेश्यागमन** — Illicit Commerce in Bodies	Modern trafficking and public-health data on commodified intimacy.
Chapter 5	**आखेट** (शिकार) — Hunting	The WWF's 73-percent wildlife collapse and the psychology of sanctioned cruelty.
Chapter 6	**चोरी** — Theft	Behavioural economics of trust, and the Corruption Perceptions Index.
Chapter 7	**परस्त्री-गमन** — Adultery	Attachment science and the largest infidelity dataset ever assembled.

Section	Sanskrit / Hindi Term	Its Modern Mirror
Chapter 8	रात्रि-भोजन त्याग — Eating Before Dark	Circadian biology and the Salk Institute's time-restricted-eating trials.
Conclusion	उपसंहार	What an unbroken 2,500-year-old behavioural code says about the limits of willpower — and the value of structure.

A Note on the Eighth Companion

Ratri-bhojana-tyaga, the discipline of not eating after sunset, deserves one clarifying word here because it is so often mistaken for the eighth vyasan. It is not that, formally. The seven vyasans are conduct a lay Jain is taught to avoid; ratri-bhojana-tyaga is a positive practice a lay Jain is taught to take up, alongside vows like non-violence in eating (filtering water, avoiding root vegetables believed to house more life) — closer in category to the mula-gunas, the root virtues, than to the vyasanas, the addictions. But the reason popular teaching keeps placing it beside the seven is instructive rather than sloppy: night-eating was understood, in the pre-electric world, to multiply the risk of the very first vyasan-adjacent harm the tradition cares about — himsa, violence to living beings too small to see by lamplight — and, more subtly, to work against the same faculty of viveka that the seven vyasans erode. It keeps company with them because it protects the same thing they threaten. Chapter Eight of this book takes up that discipline on its own terms, against a genuinely startling body of twenty-first-century chronobiology.

With the map drawn, we begin where the Acharyas themselves began — with the vyasan they, almost without exception, chose to name first.

Chapter One

जुआ — द्यूत — GAMBLING

Two Dice Games That Wrote Two Epics

Two of the most consequential scenes in the whole of classical Indian literature are dice games, and both end in ruin so complete that the rest of each epic exists to undo it.

In the Mahabharata, Yudhishthira — a king renowned specifically for his adherence to dharma — is invited to a game of dice by his cousin Duryodhana, played on Duryodhana's behalf by his maternal uncle Shakuni, whose dice were, the text tells us, no ordinary dice: they were shakuni's own, weighted and obedient to his will. Yudhishthira loses his wealth, then his brothers' freedom, then his own, then the freedom of his wife Draupadi, wagered and lost in a single throw, dragged into a hall of kings and humiliated before a court that watches and does nothing. The eighteen-day war that closes the epic is, at one level of reading, simply the unpaid bill for that single game.

In the older, self-contained story of Nala and Damayanti — told within the Mahabharata itself and beloved for centuries as a story in its own right — King Nala, under the influence of the malevolent spirit Kali who has entered him precisely through a small lapse in ritual observance, loses his entire kingdom at dice to his own brother, Pushkara. He walks out of his palace with nothing but the clothes on his back and his wife beside him, and the rest of that story is an exile, a separation, and a long, humiliating road back — a road that runs, in one of Sanskrit literature's more pointed ironies, through Nala mastering the very technique of dice-control from King Rituparna, in exchange for teaching Rituparna the secret science of horses, so that he can finally win his kingdom back from the brother who took it.

Two epics. Two kings famous for their virtue. Two games of dice. Total ruin in both cases, in a single sitting, of everything each man had spent a lifetime building. It is difficult to imagine a more efficient piece of cultural memory-work: put gambling at the hinge of your two greatest stories, and no one who has heard them needs to be told, in the abstract, what gambling can do. Somadeva and Samantabhadra were writing for audiences who already carried Yudhishthira and Nala in their bones. When their texts placed **द्यूत** first on the list of seven vyasans — and it is first, consistently, across the tradition — they were not inventing a new fear. They were formalising one their listeners already knew by heart.

Why the Acharyas Put Gambling First

The classical commentaries give a specific reason for the ordering, and it is worth stating precisely because it is a genuinely sophisticated piece of moral psychology, not a simple ranking of severity.

Gambling is placed first not because it is judged the most sinful of the seven in isolation, but because it is understood as a gateway vyasan — the one most likely to drag the others in behind it. A man who has lost at dice needs money he does not have; the shortest path to it runs through **चोरी** (theft) or through compromises in honesty that the text treats as adjacent to it. A man who has lost everything and cannot face his household sober reaches for **मद्यपान** (drink). A man whose judgment has already been eroded by the arithmetic of chance finds it that much easier to rationalise the rest of the list. Gambling, in this reading, is not one vice among seven equals; it is the vice most likely to manufacture the conditions for all the others. That is precisely the language modern addiction medicine now uses for gambling disorder — a "gateway" condition with unusually high rates of co-occurring substance use, debt-driven criminality, and family breakdown — arrived at independently, a thousand years apart, from opposite directions.

The deeper diagnosis in the texts, though, is about what gambling does to viveka — discernment, the capacity to tell what is real from what is merely wanted. Dyuta is condemned less for the money it costs than for what it teaches the mind to expect: that outcomes are decoupled from effort, that patience is for other people, that the next throw might undo the last one. Chitta-vibhrama, the corruption of the thinking mind, is the term the commentators reach for — and it is a strikingly exact anticipation of what a very different set of scholars, writing in English, in laboratories, using words like "dopamine" and "prefrontal cortex," would eventually describe.

> **यद्यपि द्यूतमेकं तथापि सर्वव्यसनानामाकरः, तेनास्य प्रथमं स्थानम्** — *Though gambling is but one vyasana, it is the wellspring of all the others; for that reason it is given the first place.*
>
> *— paraphrasing the classical rationale given across the shravakachara commentarial tradition for dyuta heading the sapta vyasan list*

The Brain on Uncertainty

What the tenth century called chitta-vibhrama, the twenty-first century can now watch happen in real time on a brain scan, and the mechanism turns out to have almost nothing to do with money as such.

The reward chemical at the centre of the story is dopamine, and the crucial discovery of the last three decades of neuroscience is that dopamine is not, primarily, a pleasure signal. It is a prediction-error signal — it fires most strongly not when a reward arrives, but when a reward arrives unpredictably, or almost arrives and does not. A 2004 study at Vanderbilt University, using PET imaging, found that dopamine release tracked the uncertainty of a reward far more closely than it tracked the reward's size: the anticipation of an uncertain win produced a larger dopaminergic response than a guaranteed one of equal value. This is precisely the mechanism B. F. Skinner had already mapped behaviourally, decades earlier, under the name variable-ratio reinforcement — the finding that a reward delivered on an unpredictable schedule produces faster, more persistent, more compulsive responding than a reward delivered on a fixed, predictable one. A slot machine, a pack of

playing cards, and a pair of dice are, from the brain's point of view, the same machine: a variable-ratio reward generator, engineered — whether by design or by the accident of how chance games work — to produce exactly the response pattern that is hardest for a mind to walk away from.

Two further findings sharpen the picture. First, the "near-miss" effect: brain-imaging studies (notably from the University of Cambridge and, in the clinical population specifically, comparative work out of Yale and the University of Amsterdam through the early 2010s) show that a near-miss — the third cherry that almost lines up, the number that comes one away from the one you needed — activates reward-anticipation circuitry almost as strongly as an actual win, even though it is, in cold arithmetic, a total loss. The brain of a pathological gambler, several of these studies found, shows measurably lower activity in the prefrontal regions responsible for risk assessment and impulse suppression than the brain of a non-gambler — the very faculty of viveka, discernment, that the Jain texts identify as gambling's first casualty, dampened and observable on a scan. Second, and perhaps the single most striking piece of evidence in the entire neuroscience of gambling: physicians treating Parkinson's disease with dopamine-agonist medications began, in case after case documented from the early 2000s onward, to see a subset of patients — by some clinical estimates between 2 and 7 percent of those on the medication — develop sudden, out-of-character compulsive gambling with no prior history of it whatsoever, a side effect that resolved when the medication was adjusted. If dopamine alone, pharmacologically elevated, is sufficient to manufacture the behaviour from nothing in a person who never sought it out, the case that gambling is fundamentally a neurochemical event rather than a moral failing of will becomes very hard to argue against — and, not incidentally, very close to the compassion with which the Jain textual tradition treats the gambler even while naming the door he has walked through.

The World's Ledger

Move from the laboratory to the population level and the numbers describe a habit operating at a scale no tenth-century commentator could have imagined, but whose shape they would have recognised instantly.

The most rigorous recent accounting comes from the Lancet Public Health Commission on gambling, published in October 2024: drawing on data across dozens of countries, it estimates that approximately 447 million people worldwide are negatively affected by gambling in some way, with roughly 80 million meeting criteria for problem gambling specifically. A companion systematic review and meta-analysis in the same journal, covering 68 countries and representing 41 percent of the world's adult population, found that 46.2 percent of adults and 17.9 percent of adolescents had gambled in the preceding twelve months, with a global adult problem-gambling rate of 1.41 percent — and sharply higher rates, 11.9 percent versus 5.5 percent, of "risk gambling" among men compared with women. Among people using online casino and slot products specifically, the rates of

diagnosable gambling disorder climb far higher still: 15.8 percent of adult users and 26.4 percent of adolescent users, according to the same Commission's data — numbers that belong to a public-health crisis, not a harmless pastime, and numbers gathered by instruments and institutions that postdate Somadeva's Yashastilaka by exactly one thousand and sixty-five years.

The New Casino Has No Dice

It would be a mistake to read all of this as a chapter about casinos and street-corner card games, because the single most important development in gambling over the last two decades has been its almost total escape from anything that looks like a casino at all. The variable-ratio reward engine that the Jain texts diagnosed in dyuta has, in the twenty-first century, been rebuilt — mechanism intact, dice absent — inside a device most readers of this book are carrying in their pocket right now: the trading app.

Speculative trading in derivatives — futures and options (F&O), MCX commodity options, intraday equity trading, leveraged positions taken and closed within the same session — is structurally a game of chance dressed in the vocabulary of investment, and the most authoritative evidence for this claim comes not from a moralist but from India's own securities regulator. In September 2024, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) published an updated study of individual traders in the equity F&O segment covering the three fiscal years FY22 through FY24. Its headline finding: 93 percent of individual traders lost money. Their aggregate losses over those three years exceeded ₹1.8 lakh crore — more than twenty-one billion US dollars — a sum lost not by a handful of reckless speculators but by millions of ordinary retail participants, drawn in, study after study finds, disproportionately from younger, first-time traders with the least capacity to absorb the loss. A follow-up SEBI study for FY25 found the pattern had not eased; net losses among individual traders had, if anything, widened further.

The psychological machinery underneath a candlestick chart is, on inspection, the same machinery underneath a pair of dice, and modern behavioural finance describes it in language that would not surprise Somadeva Suri in the least. The near-miss effect reappears as the trade that almost hit its target before reversing — arguably a more potent trigger than an ordinary loss, because it manufactures the conviction that the strategy "nearly worked" and only needs to be run again. Variable-ratio reinforcement reappears as the unpredictable timing of a winning trade amid a string of losing ones, which — exactly as Skinner's pigeons demonstrated with food pellets — produces the most persistent, hardest-to-extinguish responding of any reward schedule there is. And overconfidence, a bias documented across decades of day-trading research (reviews spanning the last twenty-five years of published studies converge on the same figure: roughly 90 percent or more of day traders lose money over any sustained period, and the small minority who profit are disproportionately professionals with capital, infrastructure, and information retail participants do

not have), reappears as the trader's conviction — indistinguishable, structurally, from the gambler's conviction at the table — that this time, with this system, the run of losses is about to turn. Somadeva did not have a word for "leverage," but chitta-vibhrama, the corruption of judgment that mistakes the next roll for a controllable event, describes the F&O trader's mental state with uncomfortable precision.

None of this is an argument against markets, savings, or long-horizon investment, which operate on an entirely different psychological and mathematical footing — ownership of a productive asset held over years is not what either the Jain texts or SEBI's data are describing. It is an argument that the specific activity the sapta vyasan tradition calls dyuta — rapid, leveraged, chance-dominated speculation, pursued for the thrill of the uncertain outcome as much as for the money — has not disappeared from the modern world. It has simply moved indoors, gone digital, acquired a Bloomberg terminal's vocabulary, and, per the regulator's own numbers, gone on taking the same 90-odd percent toll it always did.

What the Seven-Point List Got Right

Set the four movements of this chapter side by side and a single line of argument runs through all of them. A tenth-century monk, working from patient observation of lay lives across generations and no instrument more sophisticated than attentive memory, concluded that gambling deserved to head a list of the household's most dangerous habits — not primarily because of the money at stake, but because of what the activity does to the mind's own capacity for honest judgment, and because of its tendency to drag every other vice in behind it. Twenty-first-century neuroscience, using PET scanners and case studies of Parkinson's patients that no one in the tenth century could have foreseen, independently locates the mechanism in the dopaminergic response to unpredictable reward and documents measurable damage to the exact prefrontal faculties the Jain tradition calls viveka. Twenty-first-century public-health data, gathered by the WHO-adjacent Lancet Commission across dozens of countries, documents harm at a scale — hundreds of millions of people affected — that makes gambling a first-order global health concern rather than a private vice. And twenty-first-century India's own market regulator, studying an activity that calls itself investment and files no tax return under the word "gambling," finds that ninety-three traders in a hundred lose money doing it, in amounts that run to tens of billions of dollars a year.

The point of laying these four things side by side is not to declare the ancient text "proven right" in some triumphant sense — the Acharyas were not doing epidemiology, and it would flatten their achievement to pretend they were. The point is narrower and, on reflection, more remarkable: a system of ethics built entirely on introspective observation, refined across many lifetimes by people whose stated goal was liberation rather than data collection, kept independently arriving at conclusions that it would take modern science's full instrumentation — brain scanners, national

regulators, global health commissions — to rediscover and confirm in numbers. That pattern, once noticed in a single chapter, becomes the question the rest of this book goes looking for, vyasan by vyasan: how often, and how precisely, does it repeat?

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